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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage January 30 on the debt-ridden Rebar Asia Pacific Group; on the Legislative Yuan's decision Monday not to hold an extraordinary session; on the year-end legislators' elections; and on a young TV actress, who died Sunday in a serious car crash. All three English-language papers ran on their inside pages a Central News Agency story which quoted AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt as saying on Sunday that "U.S.-China-Taiwan relations are currently stable, regardless of the state of Washington-Taipei, Washington-Beijing or cross-Taiwan Strait ties." In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed piece in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" commented on President Chen Shui-bian's recent remarks regarding Taiwan's new constitution and its UN bid. The article said Chen has successfully taken advantage of the changing international situation and sown new discord between Washington and Beijing over the Taiwan issue. End summary.

"A-Bian [Successfully] Seizes the Achilles' Heel in the U.S.-China Relations"

Emerson Chang, Director of Nan Hua University's Department of International Studies, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (1/30):

"President Chen Shui-bian proposed January 26 in front of five former foreign heads of state that he will push for the writing of a new constitution and the island's bid to join the United Nations under the name of Taiwan. He made the same announcement to the whole world again on CNN January 27. It is generally believed that Chen's purpose for doing so is to seek to take on the role as paramount leader for Taiwan independence, to shift the public's attention from the scandals [involving the First Family], and to set the tone for the next election campaign. Such a view is quite plausible and evident. ...

"... After Chen gave his New Year address for 2007, China's Taiwan Affairs Office waited for two whole weeks before it announced that this year will be 'a critical year for anti-Taiwan independence.' As of January 29, Chinese officials did not say anything, not even giving an intimidating statement, to Chen's announcement on January 26. By coincidence, it was all silence for Washington as well. Neither the U.S. representative in Taiwan nor the State Department has released any routine or standard answer. This deadlocked situation indicated that both Washington and Beijing are giving serious thoughts about how to respond [to Chen's remarks], and their pondering is a result of the changes in the international [political] climate.

"It has been just a year since Chen mentioned the writing of a new constitution on the Lunar New Year holiday in 2006 (the first time he mentioned it was in October 2003), but for both Washington and Beijing, major changes in the international environment happened just during this past year. In an attempt to safeguard its

hegemonic position in East Asia, the United States has started from the beginning of 2006 to resume its plan about the island chain in the Pacific and to lure India into becoming its strategic partner. By doing so Washington will be able to contain China anytime from East Asia and South Asia; in the meantime, it intends to control the Indian Ocean and the Straits of Malacca, a path where oil delivered to China must pass. But this strategy failed to work because the Pacific island chain has got rusty; China has long since established a 'pearl chain'-like strongpoint along the coast from Pakistan to Hainan; and China has successfully befriended India.

"Pyongyang's nuclear test also sabotaged Washington's strategic containment attempt in Northeast Asia. The United States has not only failed to contain China, but its territory has also been surrounded by China, North Korea, and Russia in the shape of a sack.

Washington thus urgently needs to strengthen its alliance with Japan, and the strategic importance of Taiwan, as a result, has risen all of a sudden. One evident consequence was that the United States could no longer follow its previous practices and publicly rebuked Chen's remarks. Washington's changing attitude toward Chen was actually traceable: It granted Chen's transit of California in early January. The cross-Strait issue will also be included and play a significant role on the agenda of the (two plus two) meetings between high-ranking U.S. and Japanese defense and foreign affairs officials in February.

"... Since Chen has successfully seized the opportunity and taken advantage of the change in the international environment, and he has presented an appropriate position paper (namely, Taiwan's UN bid under the name of Taiwan does not violate the 'Five Nos' pledge, and that writing a new constitution is meant to stabilize the results of [Taiwan's] democratization), it is expected that the United States will let him do it. Washington indeed has yet to give any negative response [to Chen]. The earliest public reaction from the United States came from AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt, who merely said on January 27 that the U.S.-Taiwan relations are currently stable.

Such a development put Beijing into pondering on how it should react when it obviously cannot 'restrain Taiwan via the United States.'

"... Regardless of how China reacts, Chen has successfully cashed in on the changes in the outer environment and destroyed the possible situation that Washington and Beijing will work together to marginalize Taiwan. In addition, he has sown new discord between the two over the Taiwan issue. No matter whether it bodes well for Taiwan or not, Chen's resourcefulness in terms of [Taiwan's] foreign relations is as good as his predecessor's."

YOUNG